Colorado Springs seeks a middle way

HARVEY MARTZ

LAST TUESDAY'S Colorado Springs press conference introducing the "Come Together Colorado" ballot proposal was a watershed event.

Among the 200 gathered for that occasion were not only folks representing Citizens Project, the newly formed group monitoring the religious right, but also such respected, conservative business leaders as Bill Hybl from the El Pomar Foundation; Marvin Strait, distinguished chair of a large local accounting firm; Gil Johnson, president of one of Colorado's largest construction companies; retired Gen. Jack Forest, former commander of Fort Carson; executives from the Broadmoor Hotel, and attorneys from well-established law firms. Also present were representatives from the Urban League, NAACP, some religious leaders, the acting president of Colorado College, and one city council member.

What brought this diverse group together was a promising effort to undo the confusion and the economic fallout surrounding the passage of Amendment 2.

A clarifying amendment was presented by Colorado Springs attorney Greg Walta, who describes himself as a "born-again Christian" and is a member of a local Evangelical congregation. He has taken both the proponents and the opponents of Amendment 2 at their word and offered a clarifying amendment which prohibits affirmative action or quotas for gay, lesbian or bisexual citizens but also prohibits discrimination against those citizens at work, in housing or in public accommodations. Exceptions to this discrimination clause include all churches, church school or religious associations, all non-profit 501 (c) organizations, businesses with less than 10 employees, owners or tenants seeking roommates in shared living space and several other activities and organizations.

What was so encouraging to me and many others in this city was the combination of statements that we heard. Several spokespersons said they believed the publicity by proponents of Amendment 2 had been misleading and that they had voted for something which they now regretted.

Steve Bartolin, president of the Broadmoor Hotel, said "The language in the proposed clarification amendment is exactly what I thought I voted for."

Gil Johnson of the GE Johnson Construction Company said, "I voted yes on Amendment 2, but I got duped." He went on to urge, "It's time to take back our state and tell the country that we are not run by extremists."

Several business leaders witnessed to the difficulty of competing nationally when prospective clients know that they are from Colorado Springs. Several spokespersons reminded us that discrimination and intolerance are bad for business.

But even more inspiring to this United Methodist pastor's heart were the other speakers who are supporting the clarifying amendment because not only are discrimination and intolerance bad for business, but discrimination and intolerance are simply wrong — and un-American.

That belief is supported in a recent Newsweek poll in which 78 percent of the respondents stated they believe that gay and lesbian Americans deserve equal job opportunities — just what the final phrase of Amendment 2 prevents.

But a profound confusion still exists about the implications of this amendment. Also last week in my city, the results of a poll of Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce members was published. Of the 712 respondents, 59.5 percent would vote again for Amendment 2 if the election were held today. But 91 percent said they don't believe discrimination against gay, lesbian and bisexual persons should be permitted in the state constitution!

One of the most tragic elements of the last six months' debate is that such influential groups as Focus on the Family have encouraged, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, discrimination and intolerance against people who are different. Jesus, after all, got in trouble because he associated with the wrong kind of people, was "soft on sin," and was too willing to include and accept the folks that respectable leaders thought were unacceptable — sometimes without even asking them to change their behavior first.

The exciting concept that appeared again and again in last week's press conference was that this group represented "the moderate center of the Colorado Springs community." Yes, Colorado, Colorado Springs does have a moderate center and it's gaining strength.

Here were usually quiet, usually conservative, usually cautious business and civic leaders standing up for a moral cause and being willing to speak out against discrimination — not just because it's bad for business, but simply because it's wrong.

Harvey C. Martz is senior minister at Calvary United Methodist Church in Colorado Springs

of the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Colorado has positions open for crisis line monitor and court room monitor.

The organization is also having a volunteer training session beginning Feb. 27. The training prepares volunteers to staff the 24-hour crisis line and to provide crisis intervention to lesbian, gay and bisexual **victims of hate crimes and domestic violence.**

For information on volunteer opportunities or the training session, call Jody at 831-6268.

■ **DENVER — Project Angel Heart** needs volunteers to prepare, cook and deliver meals and provide support to homebound people. Please call 388-1315.

■ **THORNTON — Arapahoe House** needs volunteers as counselors and for office administration. Hours are flexible. For more information, please call Jill Friedman Fixler at 657-3700.

■ **DENVER — Denver Victims Service Center** is accepting applications for its next volunteer training class in May. The class prepares volunteers to **answer calls from crime victims** on the center's 24-hour hotline. Training covers listening and telephone crisis intervention techniques, the criminal justice system, trauma and grief, victims compensation and other resources to help victims. Please call 860-0660 or 860-955 (TDD).

■ **JEFFERSON COUNTY** — The **Jefferson County Department of Health and Environment** needs volunteer **nurses** to assist with immunization and flu clinics. Interested volunteers must possess a current Colorado nursing license.

Volunteers also are needed as **receptionists, story time** and **arts and crafts leaders, clerical assistants, smoking cessation support group leaders** and for **daytime child care.**

For more information, please call Jeanne Moon at 239-7030.

■ **DENVER — United, We Hold the Future in Our Hands,** needs volunteers to **teach a safety program** to grades K-12. High school students are especially wel-

The Denver

COLORADO TODAY: Strong west winds in the upper levels of the atmosphere will bring clouds to much of the state today through tomorrow. There will be no cold air, and any rain or snow shower will be most likely in the west.

Highs: East: 49 to 59, Mtns: 30 to 49, West: 38 to 50
Lows: East: 22 to 30, Mtns: 5 to 24, West: 14 to 30

EXTENDED FORECAST: Ch
with clouds limiting sunshine;
snow shower may occur over
elevations. A rain or snow sh
also occur in a few spots Tue
Wednesday with snow or flur

ON THIS DATE